

Spirit of the Season

Lent 2007

Liturgical Year C www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/SOS

Cycle & Seasons

The liturgical seasons give a particular shape and colour to the Church's - and often a school's - year. They will do this sometimes in a literal way - through the colours of vestments, banners, even the colour paper we use for prayer sheets. However the seasons will also focus us on a particular aspect of Church life.

Very often the theme of the season will be picked up by the Cycle of Prayer. In the Cycle of Prayer for Lent this is seen most clearly in the prayer for Candidates for the Sacraments.

The season of Lent has its ancient origins in the period of final preparation of men and women for sacramental initiation. They spent the 40 days of Lent in their final preparation for becoming members of the Church, the Body of Christ, on Easter Night at the great Easter Vigil. In a celebration rich in its use of the scriptures and liturgical symbols, they would die and rise with Christ in their baptism; be anointed with chrism as a sign of their receiving the gifts of the Spirit and then for the first time receive Holy Communion, the food that sustains Christians as they seek to be faithful disciples.

For many centuries, and especially because infant baptism came to be the usual way of 'making' Christians, the character of Lent changed from being a time dedicated to preparation for baptism to becoming a time for the devotional and spiritual renewal of those already baptised, as they prepared for Easter.

The re-introduction of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (and the closely related *Rite of Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age*) means that once more first sacraments are commonly celebrated at Easter. The Vigil again includes the baptism of adults and children of catechetical age (i.e. those who are of school age). Even for children baptised in their early infancy, their sacramental initiation is more and more commonly completed, through Confirmation and First Communion, during the Easter Season.

Especially when one knows that children or school staff are going to be celebrating these sacraments, this particular focus of the Cycle of Prayer is a good way of getting a 'hold' on what Lent is about, and strengthening the links which already exist between the community of the school and the local parish community.

Lent
21 February - 5 April 2007

Candidates for the Sacraments
The Sundays of Lent

Women's World Day of Prayer
1st Friday in March 2/3/07

The Needy and Hungry of the World
Lent Fast Day
Friday of the 1st week in Lent 2/3/07

Penitents and Wanderers
[www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/
Calendar/Cycle](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Cycle)



Making Connections

Public & Private Prayer

Let us begin by contrasting two forms of prayer.

The Liturgy is the public prayer of the Church. It includes the Mass, the Sacraments and other rites and the Liturgy of the Hours. How we celebrate the Liturgy is laid down in official books, the Roman Missal, for example, with its General Instruction. It is made up of familiar texts and ways of praying; it expresses the belief of the Church; it is something the Church does as the Body of Christ.

Silent prayer can be used in a number of different ways. For some people it can be a process of emptying, letting go of distracting thoughts; for others it can be space to reflect carefully on a question or problem; some might use the time for the slow repetition of a phrase of scripture; others might contemplate an image. Times of silence are private and personal; ours to do with as we choose.

It is possible to connect these two on a line with the Liturgy at one end and silence at the other. On points in between you might find different ways of praying: liturgical prayer, a time of prayer, collective worship, devotions, a time of reflection, private prayer.

This line is not necessarily only ascending upwards to the Liturgy rather it is dynamic, it has movement. The Church teaches that the Liturgy is the source and the summit of the activity of the Church but it also reminds us that the liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church (cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 9, 10). It may be helpful to see this line, or chain, as a continuum where we can recognise different stages but also see that between, say, collective worship and a time of prayer, the edges may be blurred.

This may all sound a bit complicated and the intention is not to provide a detailed map where we can spot difference, ticking off various features and so are able to confirm that we have been reflecting in the last prayer time. No, the intention is more to recognise that we pray in different ways, some maybe more formal than others, and that these different

forms are not discrete but are connected.

It can also be helpful to recognise that as we move towards the 'Liturgy end' of the continuum there are greater demands on our engagement and participation. The different ways of praying have different levels or expectations about how people take part. This should help us to make appropriate choices, to appreciate that at different times and with different groups we may wish to approach prayer in a variety of ways.

This variety is important. If our experience of prayer is primarily in one form we lose the richness that the Church offers. At best the different ways feed into each other; there can be a symbiotic relationship between the celebration of the liturgy and prayerful contemplation. A celebration of Mass, for example, should give food for reflection. In turn, this reflection should enable us to participate in the Mass more deeply. To add a third element, the Mass nourishes us to go out and serve the Lord in our daily lives. It is our living that provides the material for reflection as we ask where did I meet Christ today or where did I recognise God at work? Our reflection either leads us to thanksgiving – for what God has done – or to petition – as we offer to God what we have done. Both these attitudes of prayer and praise find their place, possibly our point of entry, in the Mass.

Points for Reflection

- Which ways of praying do I find most helpful? Or am I most comfortable with?
- How does this affect my preparation of prayer with the children?

Points for Action

- Compile a list of all the different ways of praying the children experience. Do an audit to see what forms are more popular.
- How does it help to arrange these ways in a continuum?
- Consider ways of connecting different moments of prayer by using common elements so that they are not seen as isolated or separate. For example, light a candle, use a linking song or make a connection in an introduction.

Psalm and Variations

An important, and useful, skill to develop in using liturgical music is the ability to use a piece of music in different ways.

To explore this idea we will look at using the psalm in the liturgy in particular Ps 22 (23) *The Lord is my Shepherd*. (For details of the music and further ideas check the website.)

The psalms are the Church's first hymnbook and were written to be sung. One of the reasons for singing the psalms is because of the rich variety of prayer and emotions that they present us. Because the Church hopes that they will be sung in the liturgy it encourages the use of Common Psalms which can replace the given psalm as appropriate. It would be useful to begin to build a set of Common Psalms that you can use across the year.

The psalm is not restricted to the liturgy of the word. The first variation is the different ways that the psalm is used in the liturgy. Some psalms were written to accompany processions. At Mass this could be for the Entrance or Communion Procession.

The second variation is the variety of musical forms that can be used to sing the psalm. The usual form is the verse and response where the response is sung by all and the verses sung by a cantor or group. It models a dialogue where we listen to the word and respond to it. Within this musical form there can be much variety. One example would be a simple setting (Gelineau) with a short response and verses where there is an emphasis on the text over the music. This could contrast with a more elaborate setting (Haugen) where there is a longer response, which people can take to heart, and verses where the composers aims to express the text through the music. Other ways of singing the psalm would include a hymn paraphrase (The Lord's my shepherd), an ostinato chant (O Christe Domine Jesu) or a litany (John Bell).

The third variation would be how to use the psalm setting. The most obvious way would be to sing it directly as written. If for this section we take as an example *Shepherd me, O God* by Marty Haugen this would mean verses sung by cantors and a refrain sung by everyone. There would be a keyboard accompaniment and there may also be other instruments playing. The first question might be how we change the sound of the music - this might be using the instruments, different voices for the verses or a contrast between solo and group. We might consider how the psalm would sound unaccompanied. The reasons we would make these changes would be for their effectiveness in the liturgy. More creatively we might look at how we use the music. Do we need to sing all the verses? etc.

The variations we choose may be linked to how we learn the piece. First the refrain might just be used on its own – as a response to prayer, for example. An alternative might be to use the verses but to have them read over the music. However we sing the psalm it should first of all enable people's prayer

Looking Ahead: Easter

Look for songs that speak about Christ, his resurrection, joy, Alleluia, water and new life.

Through the Easter Season the Church reflects on what it has celebrated during the Easter Triduum: the dying and rising of Jesus and the rising to new life of new members of the Church through the waters of Baptism. The Church describes it as above all the time for singing Alleluia.

If we have celebrated Lent well it is easier to celebrate Easter because of the many contrasts one can make between the two seasons, through colour and atmosphere: white and gold, flowers and other decorations.

This should be the time for using your most exuberant Mass parts and other songs. Add descants and instrumental parts. Be upbeat!

What shall we sing?

Prayer Responses

There are many times in liturgy and prayer when it is appropriate to use a short sung prayer response. The most obvious place would be as part of the Prayer of the Faithful or time of intercession. A sung response is a simple way of uniting everybody in a common response. A sung response allows more time for everyone to be caught up in the prayer. Used well a sung response can help pace the prayer, leaving a suitable pause for silent prayer after each intention. When developing good practice like this it is sensible to check that all the ministers know what is happening – their confidence will allow others to enter the prayer.

In some circumstances it may be helpful to have music that continues underneath the spoken intention or you may use a setting that has a sung verse or intention. Be careful about using long responses where it seems to take considerably more time to sing the response than pray the prayer.

Putting it Together - Longer time of prayer

There may be times in school when it is not possible to celebrate Mass or when it may be appropriate to have a non-Eucharistic liturgy. These liturgies can take a variety of forms.

However, this flexibility can also bring with it the dilemma of 'What shall we do instead of Mass?', 'How will we start?', 'How will it be relevant?' etc. Often the sight of a blank page is enough to put us off rather than inspire our imagination!

So what can we do? Firstly, within the Church there is a richness of other forms of prayer:

- Morning/Evening Prayer
- Stations of the Cross
- the Rosary
- Reconciliation Services
- Novenas
- Holy hours etc.

Do we really take full advantage of this wealth of liturgical styles?

Secondly, in school there may be forms of prayer more familiar to the pupils or which they enjoy that need a little bit longer than the 5 or 10 minutes during assembly or which benefit from a congregation bigger than a class/form.

Thirdly, you may want to develop a longer time of prayer based on the liturgical season, such as a Lent Vigil or Ash Wednesday liturgy. These celebrations can be an opportunity for the pupils to be involved in all aspects of the liturgy, from preparation

to leadership, and a chance for them to experience a share in the responsibility for the spiritual dimension of school life and to fulfil part of their baptismal vocation. If you've never tried it why not give it a go?

Below are some ideas you might wish to use for a longer time of prayer using the liturgical structure of Gather-Listen-Respond-Go. They are not intended to all be used in a single liturgy but they are intended as a starting point to inspire you to create your own ideas.

Gather

- Create a focal point for the prayer time using pieces of material, candles, flowers, a bible etc.
- Send out invitations to this special time of prayer.
- Begin with a procession of all those involved in leading the prayer time.
- Take time over the Gathering to create an atmosphere of prayer.
- Use a Gathering chant that can be repeated and built up, may be interspersed with short phrases from scripture.

Listen

- Pause at different points during a reading to allow time for quiet contemplation
- Use bite size pieces of scripture but provide

thoughts for reflection in between.

- Dramatise the readings.
- Create a short structure of Listen & Respond that you can repeat to build a larger structure.

Respond

- Write a letter to God (and perhaps write how you think God might respond)
- Draw a picture.
- Invite people to take part in a symbolic action linked to the theme of the prayer time E.g. placing a stone at the foot of the cross, washing hands, sprinkling grain on a map of the world.
- Use silence or reflective music.

Go

- Give people a symbol/memento to take away: E.g. stone, cross, prayer card
- End with a final song to accompany a procession out of school/church
- Say a prayer of common blessing together

Getting in touch

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